

3: I: Interpersonal Skills and Networking - Building Bridges to Success

“Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude.”

~ Zig Ziglar



"Success isn't just what you know, but who you know—and how you connect with them."

In Chapter 2, we established that a powerful professional attitude begins with an internal mindset. But a great attitude means nothing if you can't translate it into meaningful connections with others. A strong professional attitude is the internal foundation, but its true power is realized in how you connect with others.

The third pillar of the BRIDGE Framework is **Interpersonal Skills and Networking**, the critical ability to build and sustain professional relationships. This isn't about charming everyone in the room; it's about being genuine, empathetic, and purposeful in your interactions. Strong relationships are your most valuable professional asset—they create opportunities, provide support, and amplify your impact.



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The Foundation of Connection: Why Interpersonal Skills Matter

Many people approach networking as a transactional task, with a quick ask in mind. A more effective and authentic approach is to see it as a process of community-building. Your goal is to learn from others, offer support, and find common ground.

- **Building Social Capital:** Your professional network is more than a list of contacts; it's a living ecosystem of trust and shared understanding. By investing time and effort into your relationships, you build social capital—the value you get from your professional connections, which can lead to new opportunities and a powerful support system.

Cultivating Authentic Rapport and Trust

Before you can build a network, you need to build rapport. Rapport is the invisible **This section has been intentionally abbreviated.** It builds all strong relationships.

For full insights, the BRIDGE elements, and practical applications, please refer to the complete book.

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No louder than your words. Use eye contact, and use a firm approachability. Being aware of and adapting to these unwritten rules is a key part of Relational Intelligence.



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- **Giving and Receiving Feedback with Grace:** Professional relationships are strengthened when you can navigate difficult conversations with maturity. Giving feedback should be done with empathy and a focus on growth, not criticism. When receiving feedback, practice active listening and remember the growth mindset from the previous chapter. By turning these moments into opportunities for mutual understanding, you build trust and respect.

Cultivating Authentic Rapport and Trust



- **Active Listening:** Pay full attention to understand a person's message, both verbally and nonverbally.
- **Conversational Micro-skills:** Use affirming cues ("I see," "Tell me more"), a curious tone, and subtle mirroring to build rapport.
- **Nonverbal Communication:** Use open body language, eye contact, and a firm handshake to project confidence.
- **Giving & Receiving Feedback:** Approach feedback with a growth mindset. Give specific, solution-oriented feedback and receive it by listening openly to build trust.

Intentional Networking: From Contacts to Community

An intentional network is not a list of names; it's a living ecosystem of relationships you build with purpose. The goal is to cultivate a network that is both broad and deep.

- **Be a Giver, Not a Taker:** The most effective networkers are givers, not takers. The best way to build a meaningful connection is to offer help without expecting anything in return. The most powerful phrase you can use is, "How can I help you?" This selfless approach builds a reputation for generosity and makes you a valued member of any community.
- **Leveraging Mentors, Sponsors, and Peer Networks:** Your professional community includes many types of relationships. A mentor provides guidance and advice. A sponsor is a senior leader who advocates for you and your career behind closed doors. A peer network is a group of colleagues at a similar level who provide support and collaboration. Be intentional about cultivating all three types of relationships.



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- **Building Your Digital Network:** Navigating professional platforms requires a mindful and strategic approach. Think of platforms like LinkedIn as a dynamic place for engagement, not just an online resume.
 - **Strategic Online Engagement:** Follow industry leaders, join professional groups, and share insights related to your field. Engage with other people's posts through thoughtful comments, not just likes. This consistent activity establishes you as a knowledgeable and engaged member of your community.
 - **Online Etiquette & Boundaries:** When sending a connection request, always include a personalized message explaining why you'd like to connect. Be mindful of your activity in public forums, ensuring your comments are helpful and professional. Remember that online boundaries are just as important as in-person ones; don't make a big ask in your first message.
 - **Leveraging AI for Networking:** AI is transforming how we network, shifting the focus from manual tasks to strategic engagement. Tools are now available that can help you with AI-assisted messaging, automated follow-ups, networking intelligence, and more.

Intentional Networking: From Contacts to Community

- Be a Giver, Not a Taker
- Leveraging Mentors, Sponsors, and Peer Networks
- Building Your Digital Network
 - Strategic Online Engagement
 - Online Etiquette & Boundaries
 - Leveraging AI for Networking



Tools for Building Your Network

These practical tools are designed to help you turn networking from an abstract concept into a consistent, purposeful habit.

1. **The Networking Map & CRM:** This simple but powerful tool helps you visualize and manage your network. A basic spreadsheet or a digital notebook is often enough.

- **Networking Map:** On a blank page or digital canvas, write your name in the center. Then, draw circles for different groups (e.g., current colleagues, mentors, alumni, industry leaders). Fill in the names of people you know and note a few things about them (their interests, how you met them). This helps you identify gaps and opportunities for growth.
- **The CRM Template:** Create a simple table or spreadsheet with the following columns to track and nurture your relationships:

Name and Company/ Role	Relation ship Type	Context	Notes	Last Cont act Date	Follo w-up Date
Jane (Mentor)	Mentor	Met at alumni event	Discussed career path, shared book recommendation	1 month <u>ago</u>	Next month
Raj (Colleague)	Peer	Collaborated on Project X	Looking for advice on new software	3 weeks <u>ago</u>	This week



Tools for Building Your Network

1. **The Relationship Health Check:** Use this simple traffic light model to assess the health of your key professional relationships.

- **Green:** The relationship is healthy, with regular, meaningful contact.
- **Amber:** The relationship has stalled, with infrequent contact. It needs attention.
- **Red:** The relationship has been neglected for an extended period. It needs to be re-engaged.

2. **The Three-Part Networking Template:** This framework can be adapted for both email and social media connection requests and is a perfect way to be respectful of someone's time.

Part	Description	Example
Context	Reference how you know them or how you found them.	"We met at the conference," or "I saw your article on LinkedIn."
Compliment / Connection	Mention something specific and genuine that impressed you.	"I really appreciated your insights on [topic]," or "Your work on [project] is inspiring."
Clear, Small Ask	Make a low-pressure request that respects their time.	"I'd love to follow your work and stay connected," or "Would you be open to a brief 15-minute virtual coffee?"

4. **The Give-Ask-Thanks Cycle:** To build a habit of reciprocity, use this simple mental checklist in any networking situation:

1. **Give:** Offer insight, a connection, or encouragement first.
2. **Ask:** Make a clear but respectful request, if appropriate.
3. **Thanks:** Always close the loop with appreciation and a genuine follow-up.



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Tools for Building Your Network

Example 1: Young Pharmacist in Singapore

Scenario: Young pharmacist trying to leverage on the professional societies like the Pharmaceutical Society of Singapore, and related networking events to build a specific, industry-focused network. The goal is to move from transactional "who's hiring?" questions to genuine relationship-building with senior professionals.

- **Networking Strategy:** Focus on the Pharmaceutical Society of Singapore (PSS) and the annual pharmacy congress as primary venues. The goal is not just to collect business cards, but to build a professional community.

Using the Tools:

- **The Three-Part Networking Template:** When approaching a senior pharmacist at an event, the young pharmacist can start the conversation by acknowledging their work.

- **Context:** "I've really enjoyed the presentation you gave on pharmaceutical compounding."

- **This section has been intentionally abbreviated.**

For full insights, the BRIDGE elements, and your practical applications, please refer to the complete book.

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- **Ask:** [No immediate value first].
- **Thanks:** "Thank you again for your time at the conference. Hope to see you at the next PSS event."



Tools for Building Your Network

Example 2: Mid-Level Manager Who Was Retrenched

Scenario: This manager wants to be strategic and efficient with their networking, shifting from internal corporate connections to a broader external network. The focus is on purpose-driven conversations, not desperation.

- **Networking Strategy:** Start by identifying key contacts who can provide advice or who may know of opportunities, rather than those who are just in a position to hire. Focus on activating the peer network and seeking out sponsors who may be able to advocate for them.

Using the Tools:

- **The Three-Part Networking Template:** When reaching out to a former colleague or a new connection, the manager can use this template to be respectful of their time.
 - **Context:** "I hope you're doing well. As you may know, my role was affected by the recent restructuring at [Old Company]."
 - **Compliment/Connection:** "I've always valued your insights on strategy."
 - **Request:** "I'm looking for opportunities in the [New Industry] space. For full insights, the BRIDGE elements, and practical applications, please refer to the complete book."

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Tools for Building Your Network

Example 3: An Introvert Fresh Graduate

Scenario: This fresh graduate would like to set up a networking plan that plays to their strengths—deep, meaningful one-on-one conversations—rather than forcing them into uncomfortable large-group settings.

- **Networking Strategy:** Avoid large mixers and instead, focus on LinkedIn and email outreach to build a small, high-quality network of mentors and peers. The goal is to turn online connections into focused, virtual informational interviews.

Using the Tools:

- **The Three-Part Networking Template:** The graduate can use this for a personalized LinkedIn message or email to someone they admire.
 - **Context:** "I'm a recent graduate from [University] with a degree in [Subject]."
 - **Compliment/Connection:** "I've been following your career and was especially inspired by your work on [Project or article they wrote]. I'm particularly interested in [specific area of their work]."
 - **Clear, Small Ask:** "I'm still figuring out my career path in this industry and would be grateful for any advice you might have. Would you be open to a brief virtual conversation sometime in the next few weeks?"
- **The Networking Styles Quiz:** This person would likely identify as a "Listener." This insight helps them lean into their strength by preparing thoughtful, open-ended questions for their informational interviews, such as "What's a mistake you made early in your career that taught you a valuable lesson?"
- **The Networking CRM:** The introvert graduate can use their CRM to keep a running list of people they'd like to connect with and track their outreach. This system helps them stay consistent and intentional without feeling overwhelmed by a large number of people. It also provides a structured way to send timely follow-up messages after a conversation, reinforcing the new connection.



I: Interpersonal Skills and Networking - Key Takeaways

- **Networking is about Community, Not Transactions:** The most powerful professional connections are built on genuine interest, empathy, and a long-term commitment to a professional community, not on a single, one-off ask.
- **Social Capital is a Valuable Asset:** By investing in your relationships, you build social capital—a reservoir of trust and mutual support that creates new opportunities and a strong safety net.
- **Listen to Connect, Not Just to Reply:** Active listening is the foundational skill for building rapport. It involves paying full attention and asking thoughtful questions to truly understand someone. **This section has been intentionally abbreviated. For full insights, the BRIDGE elements, and practical applications, please refer to the complete book.**

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Reflection Question: Think about a recent professional conversation. Did you spend more time listening or talking? What is one specific micro-skill (e.g., verbal affirmations, open-ended questions) you could practice improving your next interaction?

Try This Week: Reach out to one person in your desired field whom you admire. Ask for a 15-minute informational interview, using the Informational Interview Planner to prepare your questions.

Next: Chapter 4: D: Development: Your Continuous Journey of Growth. In this chapter, we'll explore how to take ownership of your career by actively planning your lifelong learning journey.

“Networking isn't about collecting contacts; it's about building connections. The power lies in authentic engagement. When you listen to understand, you don't just meet people—you build bridges” ~ YK Png

